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State Officials Urge Boaters to Use Extreme Caution in Cape Cod Bay Due to the Presence of Endangered Right Whales

BOSTON – The Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) is urging boaters to use extreme caution if operating in Cape Cod Bay, due to unusually large aggregations of North Atlantic right whales that are congregating and feeding in that area.

A record number of right whales have recently been observed in Cape Cod Bay. An aerial survey conducted by the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies on April 12 documented an unprecedented 163 individual right whales in Cape Cod Bay—a sighting of approximately 30 percent of the known population in a single day.

Aggregations of this magnitude have never been observed in Cape Cod Bay before. The animals are currently feeding at and just below the water's surface, making them incredibly difficult to see and putting them at risk for vessel collision. For the safety of both mariners and whales, **DMF is urging vessel operators in the Cape Cod Bay area to proceed with extreme caution, reduce speed (less than 10 knots), and post lookouts to avoid colliding with these highly endangered whales.**

Vessels are prohibited by state and federal law from approaching within 500 yards of a right whale. Massachusetts Environmental Police and the U.S. Coast Guard are authorized to enforce the 500-yard rule. Vessels that find themselves within 500 yards of a right whale should slowly and cautiously exit the area. Cape Cod Bay is closed to both recreational and commercial pot fishing gear from February through April of each year through the federal and state-imposed [Massachusetts Bay Restricted Area closure](#) .

The North Atlantic right whale is one of the most endangered large whales in the world, with a population of approximately 500 animals. Right whales gather annually in the waters off of Cape Cod to feed.

Management of maritime activities near right whales is part of DMF's Large Whale Conservation Program. The program is a cooperative effort between DMF, the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies (CCS), NOAA Fisheries, and the Massachusetts Environmental Trust to study and protect large whales in Massachusetts coastal waters.

Please report all sightings of right whales immediately. Call the NOAA Fisheries Hotline at 866-755-NOAA (or hail the Coast Guard on Channel 16). For more information, [visit the DMF website](#) or contact Erin Burke at erin.burke@state.ma.us or 919-824-3114, or Dan McKiernan at dan.mckiernan@state.ma.us or 617-626-1536.

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